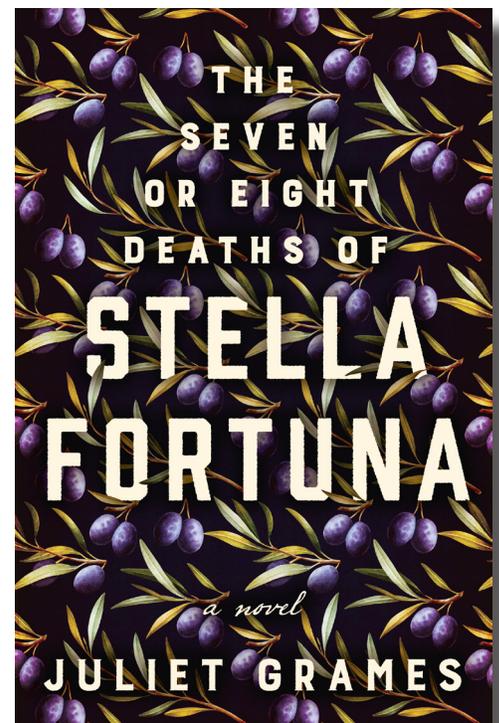


THE SEVEN OR EIGHT DEATHS OF STELLA FORTUNA

A NOVEL BY JULIET GRAMES

READING GROUP GUIDE

1. Do you think that any of Stella's near-deaths was her own fault? Which one(s), and why? Do you think Stella ever secretly blamed herself for a bad thing that happened to her? What about her family—do you think they ever believed that she had it coming?
2. The longer she is married, the more Assunta struggles with her oath to God that she will obey her husband. What individual events reshape her attitude, and how? Do you think she makes mistakes about when she should be obedient and when she should push back, or do you think in her shoes you would make the same choices?
3. Do you—or could you—believe in the Evil Eye? Do you think other people's jealousy can take form and negatively affect us?
4. Is Stella a religious person? How does her religiosity differ from her mother's?
5. Does Stella Fortuna's life have a love story? Why do you think there is never a more traditional romance during the course of her long life? Who does Stella love most? Who loves Stella most?
6. If Antonio Fortuna lived today instead of a century ago, would he be considered a sociopath? Or is he more complicated? Why do you think he does the abusive and grotesque things he does? Are they symptoms of a single underlying reason, or are they random acts of an undisciplined and naturally cruel man?
7. When Stella first experiences her nightmare, she distracts her family from what really happened by blaming an imaginary black man for an assault that happened only in her dream. Why do you think she does this? How might the situation have escalated? The Italian American community has had a reputation for anti-African American racism, which is often represented in media, like Quentin Tarantino's *True Romance* or in the episode of *The Sopranos* entitled "Unidentified Black Males." Do you think Stella's instinct to blame a black man is a product of the time in which she lived, or do you think she'd do the same today?



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Do you think that in America, where successive waves of immigrants from different places make up the majority of the population, racism is more of a problem than it is in more homogenous populations? Do the simultaneous pressures to Americanize and preserve traditions pit groups against each other and create confrontations? Or is the truth the opposite, that the mixing of so many different groups means more open-mindedness and acceptance than the same immigrants would have felt in their home country?

8. Stella knows that her father, although strict, would not want to be identified as one of the “old world” un-Americanized Italians in Hartford, and Stella uses this knowledge to convince him to let the sisters cut their hair short. In your opinion, do the Fortunas Americanize, or do they ghettoize themselves among other Italians? Which of the family members do you imagine felt more of a moral imperative to modernize or preserve traditions? Have you observed similar tensions of identity among immigrant groups you may be a part of?

9. Is Carmelo Maglieri a good man?

10. After her Accident, when Stella turns on Tina, what do you think Tina thinks? Do you think she is baffled and heartbroken, or do you think on some level she feels guilty over things that have happened between the sisters over the last sixty-plus years?

